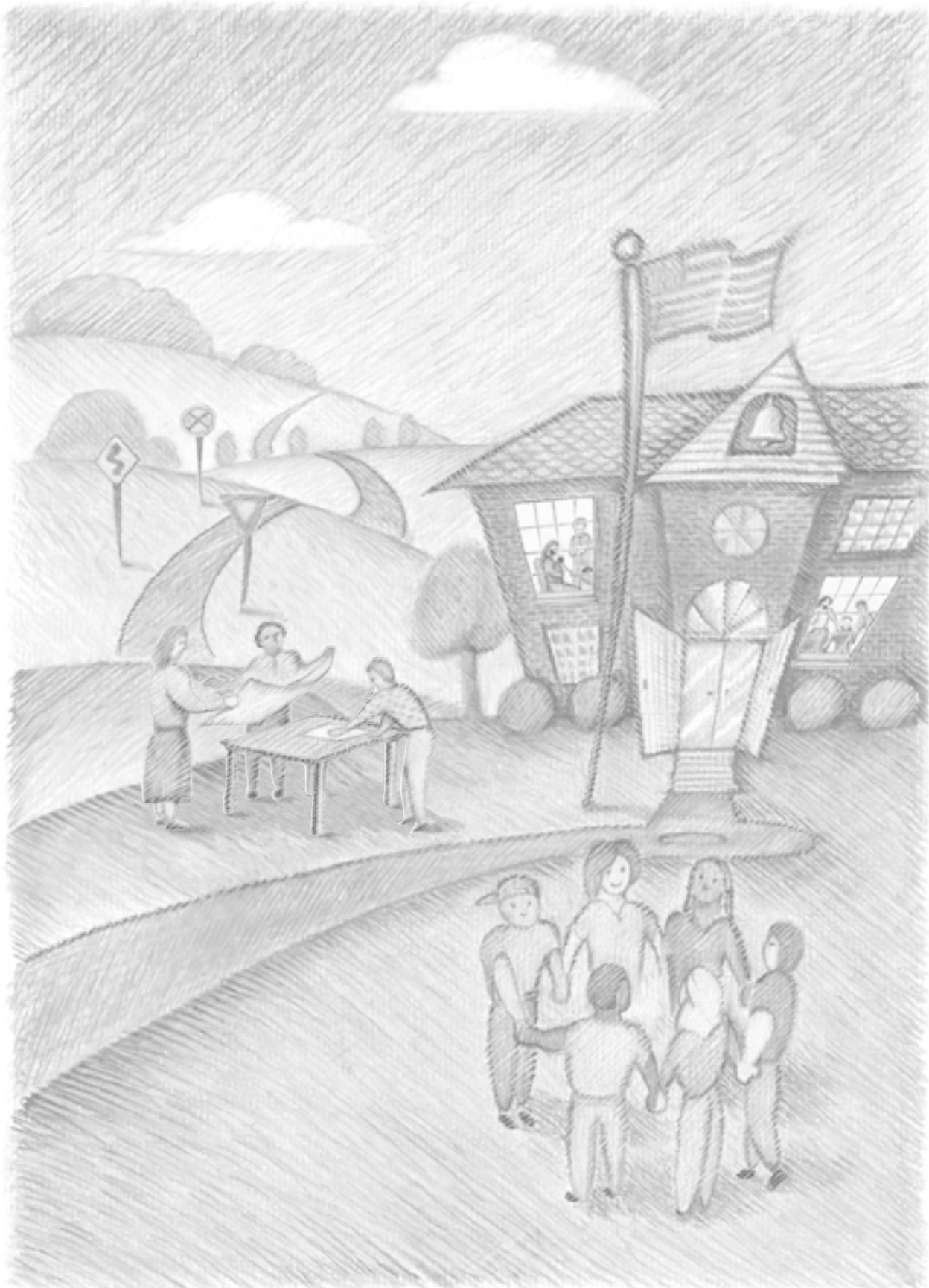


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# BEING PREPARED — BEFORE A CRISIS



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BEING PREPARED — BEFORE A CRISIS

NEA CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE & TOOLKIT

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE & TOOLKIT

nea

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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# National Education Association

The National Education Association (NEA) was founded in 1857 to “advance the interest of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of education in the United States.” With nearly 2.5 million members, NEA is the nation’s largest professional employee organization. It is also a leader in school reform, seeking a quality education for all children in safe schools where they can learn the basics, practice values such as responsibility and teamwork, and prepare for the jobs of the future.

## NEA Executive Officers

Bob Chase

*President*

Reg Weaver

*Vice-President*

Dennis Van Roekel

*Secretary-Treasurer*

Don Cameron

*Executive Director*

The NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit was prepared by Rebecca Fleischauer in NEA Communications with assistance from Richard Verdugo from NEA’s Human and Civil Rights unit and Jerald Newberry, Executive Director of NEA’s Health Information Network. For more information about the Guide and Toolkit, please contact NEA Communications at 202-822-7200.

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*'Hope' is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul —  
And sings the tune without words  
And never stops — at all.*

— EMILY DICKINSON

In This Book...

# Being Prepared Before a Crisis

Book 1 of 4 in the NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit



**SAVE PRECIOUS TIME IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS** — review, customize, and study the resources provided in this crisis kit today to avoid having to do so in the midst of a crisis. The importance of advance thinking and preparation cannot be emphasized enough. The relatively short amount of time it will take to seriously consider the five points that follow will pay big dividends in the event of a crisis.

- 1 Plan ahead** by using toolkit resources to anticipate needs and provide support.
- 2 Position the association in school crisis response plans** by demanding collaboration in developing plans. Use the crisis response checklist to evaluate your school plan, and empower the association to quickly move from a reactionary mode to one taking proactive steps that aid in school and community healing.
- 3 Build networks and relationships to make the difference.** Forge relationships and networks before a crisis strikes and establish communication channels capable of reaching critical audiences quickly.
- 4 Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the association and prepare staff to take effective action.**
- 5 Prepare materials and prepare the team** — prepare resources such as customized press releases, fact sheets, talking points, letters, etc. and place in “ready files.” Establish an organized, focused crisis response team and hold practice drills so everyone is confident in fulfilling their role.



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Robert E. Chase, President  
Reg Westver, Vice President  
Dennis Van Roebel, Secretary-Treasurer

1201 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036-3290

Don Cameron, Executive Director

Dear Friend,

Over the years, a series of extraordinary events brought severe trauma to many of our members, the students they teach, and the communities they serve. These human and natural disasters have proven that schools are not immune from tragedy and children are not spared from unspeakable suffering.

Yet this adversity has also proven something more important — the perseverance and positive will of school communities. Countless school staff, students and parents have refused to give in to despair and cynicism and let fear win. For the sake of children and their future, they have declared "Yes we can," and "Yes we will heal, hope, and triumph." I am so proud of their determination and will.

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to teaching and helping children, know that as an association we must do all we can to honor and sanctify their experience. We must do all we can to encourage children to heal and grow and to extend their hands to others who are suffering. This guide and toolkit aims to provide such a service. I pray that it will never be needed, but take some comfort in knowing it is there.

This Crisis Communication Guide and Toolkit has been developed and produced in honor of the victims and survivors of school tragedies. Each tip, resource, idea, and example emanate from those who have "been there" and want others to benefit from their experience. The National Education Association is enormously grateful for the generosity shown by so many who have shared their best practices in crisis response. I believe we are all better educators and human beings for having the benefit of their wisdom and inspiration.

I especially wish to thank Dexter Meyer, Jeanne Beyer, Deborah Fallin, Jane Goff, Jim Hodges, Phil Moeckli, Marty Bull, Jane Hammond, Jon DeStefano, Rick Kaufman, Marilyn Saltzman, Christian Anderson, Debbie Benefield, Valerie Preston, Myra Reichart, Kevin Pearson, Michelle Pollok, Cynthia Menzel, the National Association of School Psychologists, Gary Marx, and many others who have enriched this guide with their insights.

With deep gratitude,

*Bob Chase*

Bob Chase  
President





# Introduction

**THE NEA CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE AND TOOLKIT** provides resources to empower members facing crises and to guide their school communities toward hope, healing, and renewal.

A substantial body of knowledge and experience is available about crisis response. Our colleagues in states who have experienced crisis firsthand have been extraordinarily generous in sharing their experience. This guide was drafted with the direct input of state and local association staff who want others to benefit from the difficult lessons they've learned.

A crisis is perhaps the ultimate “teachable moment.” The Chinese symbol for crisis means “opportunity blowing on an ill wind.” As educators, our members are uniquely qualified to promote opportunities for learning and growth.

This guide can help members achieve three basic objectives:

- to improve your organization's ability to respond in a crisis by supporting planning and preparation,
- to come to the immediate aid of affected and vulnerable students, staff, and community members, and
- to vigorously advocate for children and school staff in healing and rebuilding.

This crisis guide and toolkit can be used in many ways. It can be a resource to be consulted, as you need it. It can be the basis for revising your district's own crisis manual. It can guide you in conducting practice and drill sessions. And it can assist you in customizing resources for your association's ready file (on paper and disk).

As an association member, you are not likely to have primary responsibility for crisis management. School district administrators, law enforcement, and rescue personnel are in charge in a crisis. However, the association has an important role to play and can act as a powerful agent for healing in your school communities.

The resources provided in this guide and toolkit can help identify communication opportunities to promote growth and healing. Using these resources, the association can help support or take the lead in providing care depending on need and circumstance.

## Icons Used Throughout this Guide



**Take Action**  
A step to take or action to perform



**Get Assistance**  
Contact information or reference materials



**State Example**  
Real-world examples from state associations who've weathered crisis



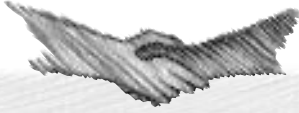
**Remember**  
Important ideas to note

**Tool**

References on how to use the tools in book 4

# Plan Ahead: Help Is Available

Get Assistance



Should you find yourself facing a traumatic event, contact NEA Communications. Help is available.

Call or page  
NEA Communications:

phone: 202-822-7213

pager: 800-275-9468

TO HELP SUPPORT OUR MEMBERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS, THE National Education Association is providing affiliates and school districts with resources to help prepare for and effectively respond to emergency situations. *SHOULD YOU FIND YOURSELF FACING A TRAUMATIC EVENT, CONTACT NEA COMMUNICATIONS. HELP IS AVAILABLE.* Whether it takes the form of written resource materials or trained people power, you will be assisted in responding to member needs.

This guide includes suggested action steps and a toolkit with individual ‘tools’ to aid in crisis communication. This guide does not provide crisis response plans that detail step-by-step action, for that is the primary responsibility of the school district and should be the result of an association/school/community collaboration. Rather, NEA’s resources can help identify communication opportunities for the association family to do what it does best — teach, inform and heal — for those affected by crisis.

## CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE AND TOOLKIT

The *Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit* is available both as a hard copy resource and as an online resource. It provides assistance for a crisis in a school community, divided into four distinct sections:

- **preparation** — Being Prepared: Before A Crisis (book 1),
- **response** — Being Responsive: During A Crisis (book 2), and
- **followup** — Being Diligent: Moving Beyond Crisis (book 3).

Book 4, the toolkit, offers **samples and templates** of key items, including press statements, letters to members, and information sheets; **tools for educators**, including checklists and crisis drill scenarios; and ready-to-copy **fact sheets** for teens, parents, and the media on subjects from dealing with trauma to guidelines for media interviews of children. Not every tool in the toolkit will be used for every situation, but the tools are available should they become necessary. In combination, the guide and tools provide a “go-to” resource for responding to a broad array of crises.

## NEA CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

NEA has assembled a team of headquarters and state staff who have the communication experience, skills, and resources needed to assist their fellow colleagues who are confronting traumatic events. Trained staff support from NEA headquarters and state affiliates are prepared to help.

# Position the Association in School Crisis Response Plans

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

By definition, a crisis in a school community is any situation that threatens the safety, the integrity, or reputation of that community. It can include natural disasters, deaths, violence, or legal disputes. It can also include a situation where in the eyes of the media or the public, a member of a school community did not react to the aforementioned situations appropriately.

The **OVERALL COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVE** in a crisis is to quickly adjust the association and school community position from one of response and reaction to one of relative control, and an ability to take proactive steps toward healing and a return to learning.

Teachers, support staff, and the association family are uniquely positioned to provide guidance, and support to obtain this objective.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CRISIS RESPONSE AND PREVENTION PLANS

There are five guiding principles for developing a crisis response and prevention plan.

1. **The association must be included.** Development of crisis response and prevention plans should be a collaborative effort among all members of the school community — the local association (teachers and support staff), school administrators, law enforcement, the fire department, mental health agencies, parent-teacher organizations, and other community partners.
2. The plans' goal should be **to support students and staff.**
3. The plans should **provide strategies for informing** all school staff, parents and broader community of the plans' purpose, process, and assignment of responsibilities. All staff must be aware of these plans and what they should do in the event of different kinds of crises.
4. **Plans should be updated and practiced** by all participants on a regular basis.
5. In the absence of collaboration with the district, the **association should be prepared to provide alternative means** for supporting members and recruit resources from within NEA and their communities.



The **overall communication objective** in a crisis is to quickly adjust the association and school community position from one of reaction to one of relative control, with an ability to take proactive steps that aid healing.

**Empowered, informed, and prepared** members can take action to:

- **provide guidance and leadership** to students and reassurance to parents;
- **execute proven strategies** to help propel those affected beyond crisis;
- **communicate** the association's point of view; and
- **support the healing process**, aiding in a return to learning.



Keep in mind that in many crisis situations, law enforcement will have complete control of the site and all action taken.



# Checklist — How Does Your School or District Crisis Plan Measure Up?

FOLLOWING IS A CHECKLIST THAT ASSOCIATION MEMBERS may want to use in evaluating their school building and/or school district crisis plans. School districts need three components in their emergency plans to respond effectively to crisis:

- 1) **policy and procedures** — solid prevention programs, thorough discipline codes and policies on threats and other breaches of security with procedures on what to do if they occur;
- 2) **operations** — an all-hazards incident management system that organizes your response; and,
- 3) **aftermath** — steps you will take to normalize and aid victims.

This list for evaluation is not comprehensive, but provides a framework for assessment.

## MEETING IMMEDIATE NEEDS — POLICY AND PROCEDURES

### *Prevention Plans*

- ☐ Was the crisis response plan developed in cooperation with the local association; police, fire, and rescue departments; psychologists; hospitals; parents; and clergy?
- ☐ Does the plan include a mission statement drafted with input from various sectors of the community?
- ☐ Does the plan include clear discipline codes with fair and consistent enforcement?
- ☐ Does the plan encourage and facilitate parental participation in sustaining safe and healthy schools?
- ☐ Does the plan put adequate systems in place for school staff to be made aware of troubled students who may pose a threat to safety?
- ☐ Does the plan make adequate communication channels available for students, staff, and community to report threats and/or suspicious incidents?
- ☐ Does the plan provide procedures for identifying degrees of hazard and matching levels of response, i.e., a *monitor level* — raising awareness of potential problems; a *standby level* — marshalling resources to respond if necessary; and an *emergency level* — deploying all appropriate resources?
- ☐ Does the plan provide for each building's safety and security to be assessed by school district personnel, police, fire, and other appropriate agencies? (See **Tool 1**)
- ☐ Does the plan provide for sufficient communication during emergencies (walkie-talkies, cell phones, multiple phone lines)? Do secretaries have emergency numbers posted by their phones?
- ☐ Is two-way communication to the school office available in every room?
- ☐ Does the plan require each building to have an adequate visitor registration and sign-in procedure?
- ☐ Does the plan require each school to implement dispute resolution training for students and teachers?

- q Does the plan include a memorandum of understanding with law enforcement and rescue crews?
- q Do other agencies and critical staff have copies of the plan?

### *Crisis Response Plans*

- q Was the crisis response plan developed in cooperation with the local association; police, fire, and rescue departments; psychologists; hospitals; parents; and clergy?
- q Does the plan include a mechanism for police to notify the school of critical incidents impacting schools, such as the death of a school-aged child, the death of a school employee, or a significant event (murder, suicide, car accident, natural disaster, community emergency, etc.) that in the opinion of police, may impact children and/or school staff?
- q Does the plan clearly state the chain of command in a crisis situation? Most often law enforcement and rescue squads are in charge of the school site and action taken in a crisis, using an incident command system. (For one example, see [www.ifpo.com/articlebank/incident\\_command\\_system.htm](http://www.ifpo.com/articlebank/incident_command_system.htm))
- q Does the plan make clear the action and responsibility assigned to all staff members?
- q Does the plan identify reunion areas where student, staff, parents, and caregivers should meet in the event of an emergency?
- q Does the plan adequately provide clear bus routes and an adequate fleet of buses for transporting students to reunion areas or other necessary locations? Are the directions clearly stated to all appropriate personnel?
- q Does the plan establish a clear procedure for releasing students to caregivers and set up accountability system for verifying names?
- q Does the plan consider how to call on and effectively use volunteer support?
- q Does the plan include a provision for sharing school floor plans for utility hookup locations, exits, etc. with local law enforcement and fire departments, including regular updates to reflect any changes?
- q Does the plan ensure that all crisis command post locations include adequate communication channels?
- q Does the plan adequately prepare for and consider multiple levels of response? [School districts should have both building- and district-level crisis response teams. While building-level teams are primarily responsible for the crisis response (and to the extent possible, manage crises independently), the district-level team is available to provide additional resources when school level teams are overwhelmed. Two-level responses are generally sufficient, but back-ups should be identified as an insurance policy.]
- q Does the plan verify notification and announcement procedures, including assigning responsibility for calls to families?
- q Does the plan identify procedures for canceling school, early dismissal, using the school as a shelter for lockdowns, evacuations, and relocation?
- q Does the plan include a mechanism for gathering and disseminating factual information to parents about the crisis?
- q Does the plan establish a phone tree that includes *all* staff, including janitors, cooks, bus drivers, and other support staff?

- q Does the plan provide adequate vehicles and systems for reporting and responding to copycat incidents and threats?
- q Does the plan include an identification of potential mental health resources outside the school district?
- q Do other agencies and critical staff have copies of the plan?

## **MEETING INTERMEDIATE NEEDS — OPERATIONS**

- q Does the plan allow for support and counseling for students and staff?
- q Does the plan consider that regular instruction may need to be suspended while the disaster is discussed?
- q Does the plan include a decision-making process that is inclusive and responsive?
- q Does the plan carefully consider collaborative planning necessary for the first day back at school?
- q Does the plan consider alternative sites for conducting school in the event that a disaster destroys school buildings or renders them temporarily unusable?
- q Does the plan designate safe rooms or locations for staff and students to receive help before, during, and after school?
- q Does the plan have adequate provisions to address ALL student needs, including physically challenged and limited English proficient students?
- q Does the plan create a process for and assign people to deal with funerals or memorial services?
- q Does the plan include a timely means for informing parents and the community of new information?
- q Does the plan include a defined policy and system for responding to media queries that is fast, reliable, and consistent and is managed by two or fewer individuals?

## **PROVIDING LONG-TERM DISASTER INTERVENTION — AFTERMATH**

- q Does the plan allow students to get assistance from additional support staff and outside professionals?
- q Does the plan make additional resources available to teachers who will be dealing with troubled students in need of extra attention?
- q Does the plan anticipate effects that might be delayed and events that may provoke them? For example, a similar incident in another location may trigger renewed feelings.
- q Does the plan anticipate the need to have an increased number of substitute teachers on call?
- q Does the plan promote the support, comfort, and space necessary for individual and collective grieving?
- q Does the plan consider how anniversaries of a disaster may provide an opportunity for planning a special remembrance, thereby diverting renewed reactions if the anniversary date is ignored?

# Build Networks and Relationships to Make the Difference

## FORGING RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOPING NETWORKS

before a crisis strikes will pay enormous dividends when you need it most. Long-term, this action will dictate the climate and conditions for school and community healing and will speak volumes about the character of the association when it is put to the test.

To jumpstart community networks, first review guidelines in your crisis response plan for connecting with the community, including law enforcement, parents, business, and counseling personnel to provide crisis response, caregiving, and healing. The checklist on page 1.6 can provide guidance in making the most of community relationships in crisis response.

Second, assess the level of involvement and investment between your school and community. Effective associations cannot ignore the importance of networks and community partnerships in supporting public schools. Precious time is wasted trying to build support for your school and association members in the midst of a crisis. In addition, requests for support may appear disingenuous and forced by crisis, rather than emanating from genuine goodwill and community fellowship.

## BUILD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are important ingredients in crisis response and prevention. Safe and healthy schools are the product of safe families and safe communities. Many state and local affiliates are recognizing this fact and, with the help of the NEA Public Engagement Project, are locking arms with community partners — parents, business, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, social services, and others — to support public schools and their central role in “community.”

Take Action



To jumpstart community networks, first **review guidelines in your crisis response plan for connecting with the community**, including law enforcement, parents, business, and counseling personnel to provide crisis response, caregiving, and healing.

Second, **assess the level of involvement and investment between your school and community.**

Get Assistance



For more information about NEA's Public Engagement Project call Sheila Simmons at 813-885-7162 or Phil McLaurin at 202-822-7317.

### State Example



#### **EXAMPLE: CLark County Public Engagement Efforts**

The population explosion in Las Vegas in the last five years is leaving many feeling uneasy about their school community. Growth and the pace of change are moving at a breakneck speed, making it difficult to create a sense of community and safety. In response, the local association spearheaded a series of public engagement “conversations” around several important topics, including school safety. The results have been remarkable. By involving all facets of a school community, their collective wisdom has illuminated many of the root causes of unease around school safety. Based on the issues identified by the community, the local association started a school safety speakers’ bureau to promote proven strategies to keep schools safe and built strong links with the state attorney general’s office. These efforts have earned Clark County Education Association the district’s respect as the county organization taking the lead on school safety. These kinds of partnerships are critical in prevention and crisis response.

### State Example



#### **EXAMPLE: Columbine Community Crisis Response Efforts**

The 1999 Columbine crisis response provides an excellent example of networks, relationships and association-district cooperation making the difference. Community, state, and national support turned out in full-force to help students, their families, and school staff.

In addition, Jefferson County Education Association staff were trusted members of the school district’s core crisis response team. The open, honest communication lines between the district and association, put JCEA in a prime position to provide fast, timely, supportive information for school staff and to advocate for their needs. In the first few days following the Columbine shooting, UniServ Director Dexter Meyer was part of every discussion and major decision related to providing information about district action and crisis response. “Because I had worked effectively with district staff and leaders so often and we had a good relationship, they trusted me with very sensitive files and information,” said Meyer. “I was a trusted face they knew they could count on.”



## UPDATE AND ORGANIZE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Important physical communication channels such as e-mail groups, blast fax lists, phone trees (see **Tool 2**), voicemail, cell phones, and pagers take on new significance in a crisis. In some cases they literally become life lines. Preparation for crisis response should include making sure all lists and communication channels are comprehensive, updated, and easy to use. Instructions for using them should be prominently posted and understandable. Potential newcomers or crisis response volunteers in the office should be able to use the instructions and equipment on their own without having to ask for help. Affiliate offices will have little or no time to explain and train in the midst of a crisis.

Too often, offices take for granted the importance of communication channels for delivering important, urgent messages. Some designate one or two people to manage communication channels and all intelligence and information about using the channels reside with them. This is a dangerous practice. Information about using critical communication channels should be shared with all staff, and instructions for using the channels should be conspicuously posted.

## GET ORGANIZED — CREATE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

It is vital to response time and effectiveness in handling a crisis to have systems in place for organizing information. A guiding principle should be making sure that others will be able to navigate and use resources and documents produced by the communications center. A little planning now can save time, energy, and problems when crisis strikes. See **Tool 3** for guidance on setting up computer files and hard copy files.

“Because I had worked effectively with district staff and leaders so often and we had a good relationship, they trusted me with very sensitive files and information. I was a trusted face they knew they could count on.”

DEXTER MEYER,  
UNISERV DIRECTOR, JCEA



Determine whether your systems and lists are updated, comprehensive, and easy to use by conducting an audit of the following common communication channels:

- phone voicemail trees;
- e-mail groups;
- Internet listservers;
- Internet chat rooms or webmaster mailboxes;
- blast fax lists;
- cell phones and pagers;
- an unlisted phone line (red phone) to use and keep open in emergencies; and
- computer networks, especially backup plans. (Many districts have experienced debilitating computer crashes in the midst of crises.)

# Association Roles: National, State, and Local



Make decisions about key association roles and assignments:

- working with the district or building-level crisis response team;
- moving on-site to meet member and victim needs;
- staffing phones in the affiliate office and providing callers with fast, accurate information;
- writing correspondence and seeking out extra resources for affected areas;
- communicating with NEA headquarters; and coordinating all work.

DEFINING AND ASSIGNING CRITICAL ROLES SHOULD BE A key component of a district's crisis communication plan. The local association should provide input in developing the district crisis response team, designating roles, and tapping community resources. In the absence of adequate district/association collaboration, the association should prepare alternative means to marshal support from the community.

Such roles and responsibilities may vary in different crisis situations. However, action taken should be flexible enough to be responsive, yet defined enough to avoid confusion and conflict. Communication will be important in navigating this territory.

The following description of roles offers one view of the kinds of roles and responsibilities associations have assumed. They should not be considered "the rule," but can help affiliates get their minds around some of the needs in a crisis and think of how they might provide help.

## AFFILIATE ROLES

When crisis strikes, "normal" association business comes to a grinding halt and all attention turns to member needs. Association newsletters, meeting planning, lobbying, and research are put aside. To prepare for this interruption in business and change in priorities, affiliate staff should discuss and decide how roles may be assigned. For example, decisions should be made about which staff will be assigned to work with the district or building-level crisis response team, which staff will be assigned to be on-site to meet member needs; which staff will handle the phones in the affiliate office and how they will receive fast, accurate information to meet caller needs; which staff will write correspondence and seek out extra resources for affected areas; which staff will communicate with NEA headquarters; and which staff will coordinate this structure.

Although each affiliate should consider its own needs and personnel available, some general roles and responsibilities can be delineated. Action taken in the following roles should consider immediate, intermediate, and long-term needs.

## LOCAL ASSOCIATION ROLE

At the local association level, the affiliate staff, local president, and UniServ Director generally attend to the immediate needs of affected teachers and staff and work to ensure that the affiliate voice is represented in the district's crisis response. This includes connecting to critical communication channels and ensuring that teachers and support staff receive information quickly and have a vehicle to register their concerns and requests in a meaningful way.

The association can also provide information, research, and best practices on how to deal with member and student needs through correspondence, handouts, or messages to media. (These resources are often provided through the state and national association.)

### *Touch-Base Sessions*

In the midst of the chaos and confusion of a crisis, it is useful for local association staff to convene short touch-base sessions as a group at the end of each day (conferencing in the state association if appropriate) to give a status report, create a “to-do” list, and assign staff to take action where needed. If such brief meetings are not workable, the local affiliate may want to designate a staff member to assemble status reports and contributions to the to-do list. Items on the to-do list should include resources or assistance needed from the state or national association.

Following the Columbine shootings, the Jefferson County Education Association staff effectively organized and managed their roles by dividing work according to three functions: communications, advocacy, and on-site support; office management and correspondence; and official functions and speaking engagements. Smaller association offices would obviously not have this latitude and would likely lean on the state office for extra hands and support.

### *Leading by Example*

The local association leadership can provide a critical foundation for what follows a crisis. Their assistance and vision can help bring the school community out of its immediate pit of despair by calling on individuals to lock arms and walk away enriched and with a sense of growth. The action and example of the association family can spark and sustain critical solidarity and support.

Remember



In the midst of the chaos and confusion of a crisis, it is useful for local association staff to convene short touch-base sessions as a group at the end of each day to give a status report, create a “to-do” list, and assign staff to take action where needed.

State Example



## State Example



### **EXAMPLE — How the Local Association Assisted at Columbine**

The 1999 Columbine crisis response provides an excellent example of networks and relationships making the difference. Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) staff were trusted members of the school district's core crisis response team. The open, honest communication lines between the district and association put JCEA in a prime position to provide fast, timely, supportive information for school staff and to advocate for their needs. In the first hours following the Columbine High School shootings, JCEA staff worked closely with the district superintendent, principals, and communication staff to quickly obtain information about the Columbine shooting, assess needs, provide care, and build communication lines to a school community reeling in chaos and anguish.

Immediately following the shooting, JCEA executive director Jim Hodges (a former Columbine teacher) and local president Jane Goff (a teacher at and product of Jefferson County schools) were on-site with teachers, students, and parents.

Teachers and school staff had an immediate and desperate need to confirm the safety and well-being of their students and fellow staff. There were still many unaccounted for students and staff and anxiety and panic was high. These gathering places served to reunite the school staff and students and to provide the opportunity to ventilate and validate.

JCEA leaders Hodges and Goff also worked with district leaders to call every Columbine High School staff member to inquire about their condition and to offer assistance — a draining, but vital task that finally ended at 2:00 a.m.

JCEA UniServ Director Dexter Meyer, who is also the local association's director of communications, was directly involved in making decisions related to district actions and crisis response. This put the association in a prime position to access critical information for members and advocate on their behalf.

JCEA staff also committed much of their time to channeling teachers to regional drop-in centers set up in the school neighborhood at churches or community centers where they continued to address members' needs and concerns.

In the 24-36 hour period following the Columbine shooting, Goff and Hodges also worked to convene an all-staff meeting to deliver information and allow members to feel the embrace of the association family. JCEA and the Colorado Education Association gave every teacher a red rose and card expressing sympathy and support.

In the 24-48 hour period following the shooting, there were also many questions, concerns, and issues for school staff to process with association executive director Hodges, such as how teachers could take leave to receive care, transfer to other schools, and in some cases take early retirement.

JCEA continues to meet with and advocate for members, frequently developing lists of needs and scheduling meetings with the district to address them. "Our members want to talk to their own about their needs," said Meyer. "They are too vulnerable to talk to others and often didn't want to talk to the principal for fear of 'burdening him.' If we hadn't reached out to them, these issues may have never surfaced."

Coordinated action and responsiveness must be a prominent part of crisis response communication. In some cases, it is appropriate for the association to hold a press briefing or join a school district's press briefing to demonstrate solidarity and a coordinated action plan.

State Example



### **EXAMPLE — How the Local Association Assisted in Stockton, California**

Following the January 1989 Cleveland Elementary School shooting in Stockton, California, the Stockton Teachers Association (STA) responded to the needs of its members by developing a program of continuing support called Teachers Lending Care (TLC). A teacher from another site was paired with each Cleveland teacher. The program provided daily, then twice weekly, and then weekly contact for five months. In addition to the TLC Program, STA provided food, sponsored workers compensation sessions, and advocated for teachers' needs to the administration and superintendent. STA also collected funds to assist the families of the students.

## **SCHOOL-BASED ROLES**

Knowing what is expected can go a long way to bolster confidence for staff at the building level who have the daunting task of facing children affected by trauma. It's important to remember that "victims" in a trauma include not only the direct victims, but also the families of direct victims, close friends of direct victims, school staff, the entire community, the state, and even the nation. The reach of trauma stretches far and wide, even into the hearts and minds of children who watch TV and listen to adults talk about current events. **Tool 7** includes some guidelines on post-traumatic stress disorder based on information from the National Association of School Psychologists that school staff at the building level can use to provide care and direction and seek assistance themselves. It highlights school-based crisis response roles. **Tool 4** includes guidance for association members in identifying the kinds of roles school staff can play in a crisis.

## **STATE ASSOCIATION ROLE**

In smaller offices the state may assume the role described above for the local affiliate. In a few states, the communication director has one or two people assigned to handle all crisis response needed in their state.

Generally, if the local affiliate is overwhelmed, the state association may send a staff member (or call on NEA headquarters to send a staff member) to the crisis site to shadow local association staff to anticipate needs and resources. If needed, the state staff could serve as a liaison with the school district communications operation and NEA headquarters.

Remember



State communication staff play an important role in quickly conveying accurate information to colleagues nationwide. A school crisis in one community will soon send reporters nationwide to investigate local angles in their communities. Having the most current information about the association position can help communication colleagues provide a united, supportive front across the nation.

Based on the staff's on-site observations, the state association can play an important role in providing structure, support, and information to calm anxieties. Information about what members can expect in their own and in students' reactions to crises can provide a sense of control over what initially feels like a rush of emotions and questions. Fact sheets on common reactions to crises and suggestions for providing support can be very useful. (See **Tools 6 and 7**.)

## Convey Critical Information

State communication staff play an important role in quickly conveying accurate information to colleagues nationwide. A school crisis in one community will soon send reporters nationwide to investigate local angles in their communities. Having the most current information about the association position can help communication colleagues provide a united, supportive front across the nation.

Such communication can also include short columns, articles, advertisement, or PSA's for publication in local newsletters. See samples below.

**To:** State PR Contacts@ST@AFT  
**Cc:**  
**From:** Pat Jones@HIO@AREA  
**Subject:** Jonesboro tragedy update  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 24, 2004 at 3:32:22 pm (EST)  
**Reply:**  
**Reply:** M

**PLEASE SHARE THIS MESSAGE WITH YOUR STATE PRESIDENTS, VICE PRESIDENTS, AND ALL STATE AFFILIATES**

Thanks to all the state and local affiliates which have contacted us to share the Jonesboro tragedy report at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Ark. The school is closed and the schools and staff are undergoing emergency procedures.

Condolences to the families of those students, staff members, and teachers.

President's Personal Message:  
1000 East Madison Ave.  
Jonesboro  
The telephone number here is 870-935-0577

Beverly is handling visitation for Dr. Vannoy and Dr. Vannoy's family. Beverly is handling visitation for Dr. Vannoy and Dr. Vannoy's family.

Inside the Firewall

Page: 1 of 1

11/19/1999 to 11/25/1999

Inside the Firewall

+ You can help flood victims in N.C.

**You can help flood victims in N.C.**  
If you've been watching the news lately, you know that the eastern part of North Carolina has been hit hard by two storms in a row. Flood (the Hurricane) has caused major flooding of about 6 counties. Homes, schools, and churches are totally destroyed, and there are more than 6,000 people still in shelters not knowing where they will go once the water recedes.

NCAE is helping teachers and students in the flooded areas through its N.C. Foundation for the Public School Children. (There is a budget line for donations such as clothing, food, and other necessities. For more information, call 1-800-368-7222 or PO Box 1000, Raleigh, NC 27602.)

**Update on Columbine students and staff**  
CEA continues to provide staff. Please refer to the update in the states this morning (10:10 EDT).

1. The authorities have finally removed all the bodies from Columbine HS. One teacher and Association member died: William "Dave" Sanders, a business teacher and girls basketball coach, 35 years in the classroom, with a family of four children. Coach Sanders is being treated for his bravery during the attack on the school, as he calmly led children toward an escape route before his own shot twice in the back. Several youngsters, including a 17-year-old student with Hoy School, first aid training, tried for hours to save Sanders' life while being held off around Columbine High School. Note: A story in this morning's Washington Post speaks to the heroism and the loss of Columbine.
2. A total of 13 died according to information on school this morning, though it is not yet complete and all names have not been announced. The bodies included the two children who committed the unspeakable; they apparently killed themselves. We will hear a lot more today when some details of the investigation are released, and we expect that may include information about the many pipe bombs that the two students placed in the school and children whom they wired with explosives. This is now being called "domestic terrorism" in news reports.
3. About 16 people are still hospitalized, including teacher member Patricia Nelson who is in fair condition. A number of those hospitalized are in critical condition; others are in good condition, and quite a few others were released.

## *Coordinate Donations, Distribution & Location Information*

The state association often helps facilitate donations — money, clothes, books, food, mementos, etc. — and helps coordinate distribution. State affiliates also provide information about staff, students, and families scattered by storms and flooding.

The Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) recently worked with the local association in Wichita-Derby to set up a fund for students who lost their homes and possessions during a devastating spring tornado to replace school clothes and supplies in the fall.

The KNEA “Reading Circles” also regularly provide book donations to replace those destroyed in school and community libraries.

State Example



In the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) sent out a nationwide request for donations to the North Carolina Fund for Children to help repair and replace flooded out schools, homes, and the devastation wrought for many members and their children. NCAE spearheaded initiatives to get other organizations — state and national — to adopt schools and sometimes even members who needed assistance. Hundreds of children were displaced, many members were homeless, and some schools were closed for more than a week.

The state association issued a call for donations at the national NEA board meeting in Washington, D.C. The Michigan Education Association quickly responded with offers to donate extra language arts books for those ruined by flooding.

As if the initial storm wasn't bad enough, after the hurricane tore through the coast, North Carolina bore the brunt of relentless rains. Schools had to be closed, and alternative school sites and bus routes had to be identified before schools could reopen. Many schools would have had to remain closed for the rest of the school year.

Finding where children, teachers, and staff were located and identifying those who needed help was a major challenge in the first weeks following the storm. The state facilitated the search for lost friends and families with a toll-free phone number and web-site “people locators.” The state association used these resources and posted the information for members and their friends and family. They also used an NCAE listserv to identify which schools and teachers needed help.

State Example



## Other Roles for the State and Local Association

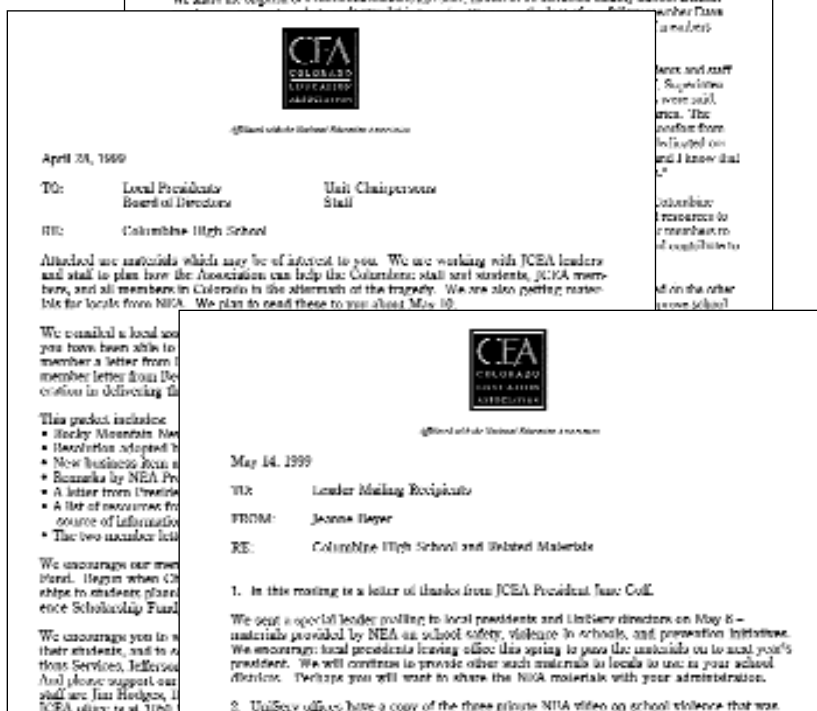
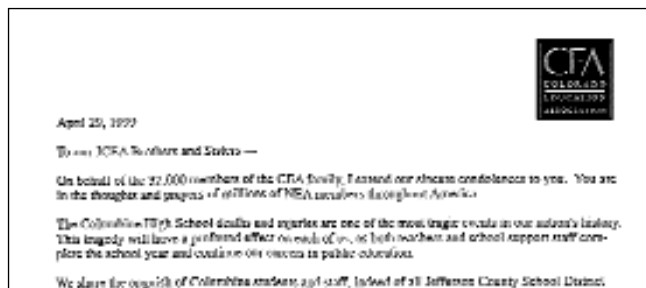
“It wasn’t a matter of asking whether Dexter [Columbine area UniServ Director] needed help. He didn’t have time to think about it and call back. We immediately went to work to identify resources and ways the state association could help.”

JEANNE BEYER, COLORADO  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

In addition to plugging into needs and gaps at the local level, the communication office at the state level can initiate communication messages that support and inform the healing process. These include:

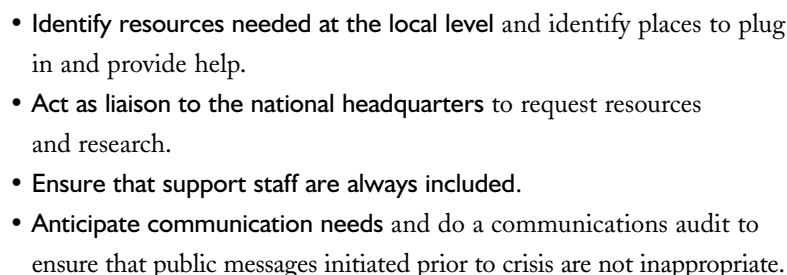
- organizing public displays of support, such as wearing symbolic pins or ribbons;
- quickly informing the association family across the nation;
- releasing press statements in support of the school community;
- providing research, information, and best practices on crisis response that can be used in letters or handouts to members or even in communication with media; and
- letters of condolence and offers for assistance to state members and the affected local association (take special care in tailoring them for each audience). See examples below.

“The association response in Kansas is pretty practiced,” said KNEA Communications Director Cynthia Menzel, ruefully. “Tornadoes are so common that every Kansan knows what’s needed in the aftermath.”

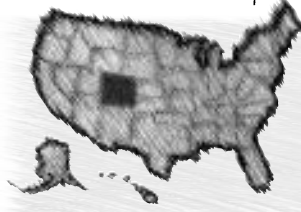




- **Coordinate donations and distribution** and thank-you notes.
- **Coordinate evacuation help** in natural disasters.
- **Organize community barbecues or gatherings** in the wake of natural disasters.
- **Provide scholarship funds** in memory of the deceased.
- **Create a photo album, video, or special memorial** honoring the life and contributions of the deceased or demonstrating pride in community efforts to rebuild in the wake of a natural disaster.
- **Provide vehicles for school staff expression.** The association newsletter can be an effective outlet for this. See the examples below.



## State Example



Colorado Education Association (CEA) staff pulled a CEA radio spot promoting public education following the Columbine shootings; NEA headquarters staff removed the standard smiling picture of President Bob Chase on its web site that accompanied a statement on the shootings.

## Get Assistance



NEA assistance can take many forms, including:

providing **broadcast and other media tools**, written materials, research, and best practices in crisis response,

**getting the word out** to the entire national association family quickly and/or

providing extra **on-site people power**.

**Call 202-822-7200.**

## NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION ROLE

NEA makes every effort to provide support and resources to affiliates in crisis. Officers have traveled to meet with members in crisis to offer advice and support, to speak at public events, and to advocate for affiliate needs. Crisis response is a top priority for the association.

Members of the NEA response team are on call to help in the event of a school crisis. This group of state, local, and national association staff are trained and prepared to provide assistance upon request. Assistance can take many forms, including:

- providing broadcast and media tools, written materials, research, and best practices in crisis response,
- getting the word out to the entire national association family quickly to alert them to a need for assistance and/or ripple effects that they might experience in their own communities, and/or
- providing extra on-site people power.

It's important to stress that the NEA response team is available to support the affiliate, NOT to take over. Because most of the team members have experienced crises in their own schools, they have a deep appreciation for crisis response support — lightening the load without getting in the way.

NEA communications is also prepared to produce press statements, opinion-editorials (see samples on next page), and other tools to help inform the public and policymakers. The association's intranet can extend the reach for this information. In addition, NEA has produced compelling memorial and school safety training videos. These videos can be powerful healing and teaching agents.

# Tears Are Not Enough

How do we rescue our children from the culture of violence?

By Bob Chase, President, National Education Association

**A** parent and a teacher, I wept in the wake of the Columbine High shootings. They took my tears — and cast a cold eye on the nation that every American parent must now reckon with urgently.

Reality No. 1 is the pervasive neglect of children in this country. I'm not just talking about the one in five children who live in poverty or the one in seven who go without health insurance. I'm also talking about children of affluence who are — figuratively and often literally — home alone.

Reality No. 2 is the omnipresence of guns. We cry for the children of Columbine, but what about the 12 children — of all colors and classes — who are killed by guns every day in the U.S.? Because of unbridled opposition by special interests, our society is unable to stop the steady proliferation of guns.

Reality No. 3 is the equally pervasive presence of bloody mayhem in the media — most notably TV, movies, music, video games, and the Net. One study found that by the end of elementary school, the average child has watched 100,000 acts of murder, assault, and rape on television. From sheer repetition, America's children are becoming desensitized to other people's pain.

For years, children's advocates have begged the media to rein in this gratuitous violence — but to no avail. The prophets of decency are no match for the profits of the "entertainment" industry.

So is anyone truly surprised that on April 20, those realities exploded into the corridors of Columbine High School? According to eyewitness accounts, the shooters laughed

as they gleefully gunned down their classmates and teachers. (I reject the media's depiction of the two attackers as "gunners." They were not men; they were deeply troubled boys. They were children.)

*"Are you waiting for your child to initiate a conversation about values?"*

And Columbine is just the most dramatic case in point. All across our nation, the culture of violence is intruding into the most precious sanctuaries of American life: our schools, our playgrounds, our homes and families.

However, as adults, we are not powerless before this onslaught. If the surrounding culture is callous toward children, then we must become "counter-cultural" in the most positive and protective sense. And every adult must get involved.

We may not be able to reason with the gun lobby and media moguls, but we can reason with the children in our lives.

How? First and most urgently, we must take the time to listen to our children. Really listen to them. This means sitting down face to face, asking probing questions, understanding your children's attitudes and anger, their dreams and emotional needs.

Second, we must talk with our children. Really talk with them. Are you waiting for your child to initiate a conversation about values, about right and wrong? If so, don't hold your breath. Take it from a teacher who has seen too many kids



hanging around his desk after school, all children are hungry for attention from the adults in their lives. They may not be crying out, but they are crying inside for the structure, direction, and values that only we adults can give them.

Third, if your child is in crisis and you are at wit's end, please do not give up. You can turn for assistance to public or private counseling services, school guidance counselors, clergy, and others. (In that order, it is time to

reverse the cuts to counselors and professionals in schools.)

And fourth, I believe we can keep our children from going to Columbine High School. She once reminded me of a child I once thought whatever I did, I was wrong. For all its weeping, America's "bullying" is cultural, and it needs to change. The change will not come within me — and in a moment to realize children.

## nea news

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Communications

For Immediate Release  
May 30, 2000

Contact: Susan Whitmore (802) 822-7250  
Steve Wolfner (802) 822-7239  
Kathleen Lyons (802) 822-7218

### Statement of Bob Chase National Education Association President on Georgia Shooting and Need for Stricter Gun Laws

Our hearts and prayers go out to the students, teachers, parents and families of the victims of the shooting today at Heritage High School, outside Conyers, Georgia. We join all Americans in hoping for a complete recovery of the injured children.

We all hoped against hope that the tragic shooting at Columbine High School was such a tragedy today would be the last time that nation had to see the faces of children fleeing from a school in panic. The last time we would have horrific stories of children shooting classmates. The last time we would have to console parents, children and teachers in the aftermath. We hoped. But we feared it wouldn't be the last. Too despite the good intentions, the discussion about safety precautions, the coming together of law enforcement, schools and the community in search of answers, the horrific facts that today, again in America we still watch too easily falling into the hands of children.

Congress cannot continue to throw up roadblocks to passage of desperately needed, common sense gun laws. How many more students' children must be injured or killed before sensible gun laws are passed?

Today, the National Education Association and the 2.4 million members call on Congress to take immediate action on the Clinton's Gun Violence Prevention Act of 1999 and other pending legislation to keep guns out of the hands of children. Congress must:

- Establish a Federal Child Access Prevention (CAP) law holding adults responsible if a child gains access to a loaded firearm that has not been properly stored and access to the commission of a crime;
- Require that child safety locks and devices be sold with all new handguns purchased in the United States;
- Deny the transfer to and possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and large capacity magazine magazines by juveniles;

(more)

# Prepare Materials and Prepare the Team

PREPARING MATERIALS AHEAD OF TIME ENABLES EVERYONE to be more focused and organized during a crisis. In book 4 of this guide, there are samples of materials and templates for creating customized materials, as well as some general materials that are ready to photocopy and distribute if that is useful to the association. Think through how each piece can be tailored to meet various types of crises. Many resources are also available on-line at [www.nea.org/crisis](http://www.nea.org/crisis) and will soon be produced on CD-ROM and disk for easy downloading and tailoring.

Again, primary responsibility for the preparatory action described here may not rest with the association. Please consider that the association may be called upon or find it necessary to act outside of customary roles and responsibilities. Careful consideration of the precedent and consequences of such action should be made and communicated to all team members to ensure coordination.



Some materials can be prepared now in full. These include general school information and contact lists — things that will be true and valuable no matter what the crisis.

## PREPARE RESOURCES AND “READY” FILES

Some materials can be prepared now in full. These include general school information and contact lists — things that will be true and valuable no matter what the crisis.

**Crisis communications plan.** See earlier chapters. Consider using the checklist on pages 1.6–1.8 to evaluate your school and district procedures, such as creating reunion areas; to create guidelines to identify parents and guardians (media have been known to disguise themselves as parents); and to devise an orderly way of releasing kids and recording to whom and when they were released.

**Prominently post steps for action in various emergencies** (bomb threat, death or suicide, fire or explosion, hostage, major student disruption, kidnapping, natural disaster, etc.)

**Post list of personnel who are trained and certified to administer first aid and CPR.**

**Phone tree.** A crisis response phone tree should always include all staff — including cooks, bus drivers, custodians and other support staff — and should be reviewed with all staff each year. See **Tool 2**.

**Badges or orange vests for key staff.** These items indicate where students and parents can go for help and information. They identify a “safe” person for children and parents who are trying to avoid the media or run from danger. This can eliminate confusion.

## State Example



In Jonesboro, Arkansas, and other school crisis sites, media posed as doctors and counselors in order to gain access to schools and hospitals.

**Go box.** Some crisis response experts suggest creating a “go box,” a box or container filled with all the critical information and tools to take to the scene of a crisis. The box could contain items such as:

- contact phone numbers,
- a bull horn,
- a complete listing of students and staff,
- a map of the area and school building floor plan indicating the location of power and utility connections,
- a cell phone and walkie talkie,
- a lap top with attendance lists on disk, and
- orange badges or orange vests to identify official school staff from parents, students, and media.

**School information fact sheet.** A school district fact sheet should provide basic facts about the school and the district. This will provide some nuggets of information for the media to use in their reports. A sample fact sheet is in book 4 as **Tool 8**.

**Media letter on covering school crises.** Provide media with information about covering school crises and interviewing children in trauma at the start of each school year. When there is a scientific, quantifiable basis for requesting that journalists not interview traumatized children, they are more likely to listen. See **Tool 9**.

**Emergency contact list.** See **Tool 10**.

After preparing customized toolkit resources, save all files in appropriate folders under a “crisis response” directory on shared network.

## USE SHELLS AND TEMPLATES

Some materials can be partially prepared now — these shells can be completed with school- and district-specific information and specifics can be filled in as needed if a crisis arrives. These items should be saved in your crisis response computer folders on the shared network.

**Press statement shell.** Create a press statement shell that includes all the generic information relevant to your school to be pulled up in a crisis, when specifics can be added. See **Tool 11**.

**Daily update fact sheet shell.** Create a daily fact sheet shell that includes all the generic information relevant to your school to be pulled up in a crisis, when specifics can be added. See **Tool 12**.

**Draft letter to local association from the state president.** See **Tool 13**.

## Take Action



Some materials can be partially prepared now — these shells can be completed with school- and district-specific information and specifics can be filled in as needed if crisis arrives. Use the toolkit (book 4) to prepare these items and save them in your crisis response computer folders on a shared network.



A number of pieces that appear in the toolkit (book 4) are stand-alone pieces that are ready to be copied and do not need to be customized.

After preparing customized toolkit resources, save all files in appropriate folders under a crisis response directory on a shared network.

Draft memo to faculty on media interviews. See [Tool 14](#).

Draft memos to press outlining parameters for pool coverage of funerals and memorials and the first day back at school. See [Tools 15 and 16](#).

Draft volunteer orientation guide. See [Tool 17](#).

Media interview/information request form. See [Tool 18](#).

Curriculum for the first day of school after a crisis. Prepare a pre-packaged curriculum that infuses trauma into the context of learning. For instance, administrators should meet with staff in the morning to provide guidance easing into the first day and dealing with student grief and information about how to receive assistance if necessary.

Draft web page for communications during a crisis. See [Tool 19](#).

FAQ document. See [Tool 20](#).

Student response form. See [Tool 21](#).

## REVIEW PREPARED FACT SHEETS AND RESEARCH

A number of pieces that appear in the toolkit (book 4) are stand-alone pieces that are ready to be copied and do not need to be customized. It might be useful to determine if there are other generic pieces that can be prepared in advance to be added to this information. After preparing customized toolkit resources, save all files in appropriate folders under a crisis response directory on shared network.

- Fact sheet for teens on reaction to stress. See [Tool 6](#).
- Fact sheet for parents, staff, and media on post-traumatic stress disorder. See [Tool 7](#).
- Fact sheet for parents on media interviews for children. See [Tool 22](#).
- Fact sheet for media on copycat threats. See [Tool 23](#).
- Fact sheet for media on interviewing children. See [Tool 24](#).
- Fact sheet for media on school safety statistics. See [Tool 24](#).

## TEAMBUILDING AND STAFF PREPARATION IN ADVANCE OF A CRISIS

**Hold practice drills.** Practice drills are critical for staff to know what to do, when to do it, and from whom to expect information and action. Action should become second nature, and key leaders in the school community should previously agree upon action.

**Hold training sessions.** Schedule crisis response training sessions and tailor agendas for practice sessions and drills for staff to prepare and understand their roles. (See [Tool 26](#).)

**Prepare for negative behavior by others.** Anticipate negative behavior patterns and prepare to create more affirmative, constructive channels to detour such behavior. Identify community leaders who can help in this effort and look for obvious vulnerabilities.

**Prepare to deal with the media.** Have a crisis response plan that implements immediate policies and procedures for managing the media and practice media response in drills.

**Define clear communication channels.** Have in place communications channels that quickly and effectively relay information and provide for feedback and questions.

## **SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR NATURAL DISASTERS**

Knowing about the potential of natural disasters and being aware of steps that can be taken to prepare (and steps that can't) can be empowering and create a renewed appreciation of the present. Infusing information about natural disasters into lesson plans and school routines can help children gain important coping skills and a deeper understanding of events in nature.

Provide opportunities to talk to children about the likely disaster in their community. Develop lesson plans to learn about weather patterns and natural events from a scientific, historic, and geographic perspective. In preparation and recovery, it's important for children to know why things happen. Learning about things such as how a tornado forms can be interesting and can help children feel a little more control over their lives.

Provide opportunities to teach children about the safety precautions for each disaster. Encourage the preparation of family and school disaster plans. Explain how to call for help.

Encourage families to let children help decide on items for survival kits, assist in purchasing the supplies, and decide on where to store the kits. Knowing one is as prepared as possible gives a feeling of stability and peace of mind.

Provide information about help that is available for staff, children, and families. (See **Tools 27 and 28.**)

Get Assistance



The American Red Cross produces a pamphlet for parents called “Family Disaster Plan and Personal Survival Guide” that discusses training family members in home safety measures, stocking of emergency supplies, and selecting what to take if one has to evacuate the home. Visit their web site at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or call them at 703-248-4222.

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